



## Good Friday | The Cross is still relevant today

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, we come together, to give heart felt thank, for Christ's sacrifice for the world on that Friday over 2,000 years ago. A Friday we in Christendom call Good Friday.

For those watching via live stream, unable to be here today, and we continue to pray that, we will all be restored to normal daily lives, that we will be able to once again come together each Sunday for worship and fellowship.

I pray, that today's Good Friday, message, will lift all our spirits, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

*Let us pray.*

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Our entrance hymn, on this Good Friday, is a hymn I came across, through involvement in Kairos Prison Ministry, way back in 1997, and it is a hymn which had a very powerful effect on those attending, from both sides of the prison fence. A hymn we still continue to sing on Kairos courses and on many of our journey days.

The song Old rugged Cross was written by an American Methodist evangelist, Reverend George Bennard in 1912, when he was struggling with a problem that caused him much suffering.

Bennard's mind went back again and again to Christ's anguish on the cross. This was the heart of the gospel.

The words from that hymn, are a good source for reflection, especially on the Church's commemoration of 'Good Friday.'

In the midst of economic hardship, physical suffering, spiritual persecution, excruciating pain, deep sorrows, pandemics and wars, the cross becomes a symbol of hope for believers.

Bennard wrote, about his deep reflection, about life and the glory of the cross into music, when he penned these words:

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
the emblem of suffering and shame;  
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
till my trophies at last I lay down;

I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
and exchange it some day for a crown.

We all recognise the Cross as a significant symbol of Christianity, and this is so because it reminds the world of the sacrificial love of Christ, which Christ expressed to humankind through his passion and death.

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 1;  
*"As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ," and he then goes on to say "the message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for those who are being saved it is God's power".*

St Paul was addressing this message to the Jews who saw the cross as a burden for criminals and suffering as punishment for sinners. May I refer you to the book of Deuteronomy 21:20-23, my translation is from the NRSV, and I quote:-

*"When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the LORD your God is giving you for possession."* (Deuteronomy 21:20-23)

Therefore, they claimed, it is out of place to believe in some-one who is crucified.

On the other hand, the Greeks who were the renowned thinkers and philosophers of the time, saw the cross as a sign of foolishness. In all their knowledge they could not understand how God uses 'foolish things' to express his greatness. We could ask what has changed in today's "super information at your finger-tips culture?"

**The cross has a message for all of us today.** It gives meaning to the many trials and troubles in the world, and for standing as a symbol of love as well as a symbol of victory.

We need to continually remind ourselves, that trials are an inevitable path towards the attainment of salvation and victory. In St Matthew's gospel 16:24, Jesus emphasised this fact clearly to his followers when he says, *"If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross and follow me"*

The cross brings to memory the sacrificial love of the one who hangs there. It is a clear proof of his love, that Jesus laid down his life for us, and challenges us to do the same for our brothers and sisters. Two passages from St John, demonstrate this:-

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.* (John 15:13)

And 1 John 3:16

*We know love by this "that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another".*

The early Church Fathers interestingly interpreted the four cardinal points of the cross as symbols of the love of Christ. According to them,

- the vertical points signify the height and depth of his love
- the horizontal points expressing the width and breadth of that love.

In Kairos, this symbolic imagery is used to show the men, us included, just how big God's love is!

The early Church Fathers interpretation is closely connected to Paul's words that he prayed for the Ephesians in (3:18), to have the strength to grasp the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love.

The message of the cross is a paradox, because it seems to contradict itself, but in that contradiction, is found an inherent truth (death bringing forth new life). This also shows how, that which is negative, turns to be positive. What a wonderful lesson that is for all of us.

Likewise, suffering and pain can bring about unimaginable blessings. It is within this context that we can understand why the tree of death has turned into a life-giving tree.

In the very beginning, a tree brought about the fall of Adam, but in the new dispensation, a tree has brought about the glory of the new Adam, namely Christ. This is so because by his Cross, Christ has redeemed the world. It speaks so eloquently about the temporal victory of evil over what is good.

The Apostles saw in the cross the secret of their success and so one of them exclaims, *"As for me, however, I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 6:14).

Good Friday is a day, for all of us, to pause and think of the meaning of the passion and death of Jesus Christ.

It is also a time to reflect on how Christ's wounds bring healing to many, and how his death offers salvation to everyone.

The cross has a pride of place in Christianity, just as the incarnation and resurrection are important landmarks in the economy of Christian salvation.

The hope of resurrection gives meaning to the passion and death, which is commemorated on Good Friday.

The cross then becomes to us a symbol of hope, which blares out the message:

**No crown without a cross; no cross without a crown; or as we say in our culture, no pain, no gain. Amen.**